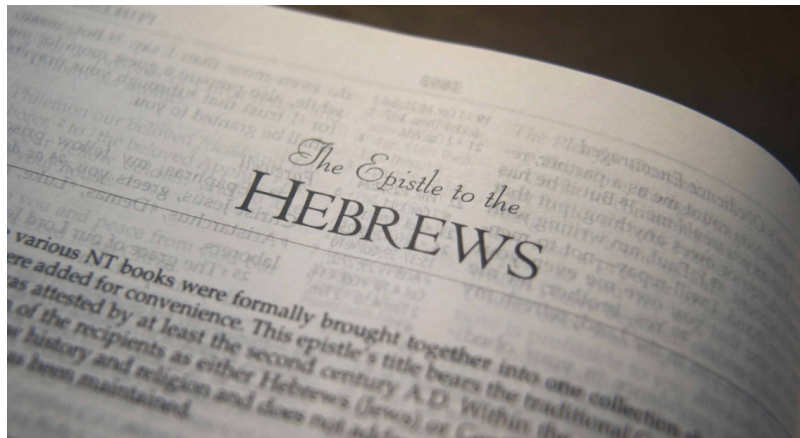


“After God Spoke...He Spoke”

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Nathan Brown



“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the

word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:1–4, NASB95).

Words denoting oral communication occur seventy-three times in Hebrews, proportionately more frequent than any of the other non-narrative books in the New Testament. In almost every case, God speaks something from the Old Testament or, as the author prefers to call it, the “first covenant” (e.g., 8:7). God’s previous revelation provides the author of Hebrews with material for all three components of his message—theological argumentation (e.g., 1:5–14), positive encouragement (e.g., 13:6), and warning (e.g., 12:25). Thus, the inspiration and continuing authority of God’s previous revelation gives the book persuasive power, yet part of what he proves from God’s previous revelation is that it testifies that the *first* covenant is not intended to be His *only* covenant and that the coming covenant will be superior (e.g., 8:8–13). The prologue, quoted above, introduces this topic, and the author returns to it in various ways throughout the book. Notice that, in contrast to many later, the author of Hebrews insists on both the continuity between the parts of God’s revelation and the superiority of the recent one.

The book of Hebrews insists that God’s message to humanity is coherent. According to the prologue, God “spoke” both “long ago to the fathers” (1:1) and “in these last days...to us” (Hebrews 1:2). The author shows that the Old Testament itself points to another covenant beyond itself (e.g., 8:8–13). Indeed, the author points out that the ceremonies of the Mosaic covenant had no meaning without their fulfillment in God’s recent message, in Jesus (e.g., 10:4). Moreover, the Old Testament teems with promises that are not fulfilled within its pages. If God is faithful, as His previous revelation insists (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:9), then the first covenant cannot be the end of

the story (cf., e.g., 11:40). Not only were the Jews still waiting for God to fulfil his messianic promises, but the author's exposition of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3 and 4 shows that the land promise that God had made to Abraham, (one of the three basic promises on which the covenant with him and his descendants depended), had only been fulfilled in a preliminary way: "for if Joshua had given them rest," David would not have warned of the possibility of not entering God's rest (4:7-8). The unfulfilled promises of God made it clear that He was not finished talking.

Thus a further word from the Lord, in itself implies, the superiority of the more recent message. God does not speak for no reason. Another message implies that He had something important to say that He had not already covered. Moreover, the loose threads from the Old Testament, upon which the author relies to show God's foreshadowing of the new covenant, testify to the superiority of the new covenant which ties them all together.

To remove all doubt, the prologue explicitly contrasts the stages of God's revelation in several respects. God's previous revelation was "long ago to the fathers in the prophets". The subsequent message arrived "in these last days...to us in His Son." Mentioning the "last days" raises the spectre of those promises awaiting fulfillment by those familiar with what God had said "to the fathers in the prophets" (cf., e.g., Isaiah 2:2). A message directed "to us" is worthy of at least as much attention as one directed "to the fathers." A message that came from God's Son is worthy of more attention than one that came through the prophets, who were His servants (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 14:18).

The kicker, is the element in the first clause that has no equivalent in the second: the author specifies that God's previous message came "in many portions and in many ways." God did not give the entire message of the Old Testament to any one person at one time: Abraham got a piece, Moses, a bigger piece, and each of the prophets received their own portions. It took about a thousand years for what we know as the



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Tim Alexander is a life-long Christian with a love for languages. He reads his Bible with an eye for getting away from human-made traditions and discovering the pure will of God. He works for a non-profit Christian organization and has had the opportunity to travel and speak in churches around the world.

Tim and his wife live in Beamsville, Ontario, Canada.

Old Testament to come together. Likewise, God's message in the Old Testament came "in many ways," i.e., through many means. Sometimes God spoke directly to the prophets and at other times through dreams or visions. By contrast, God's message through His Son came all at one time and in one way. God sent Jesus into the world to reveal Him. As the apostle John puts it, "Nobody has seen God at any time; the unique God who was in the bosom of the Father has explained Him" (John 1:18). The author of Hebrews does not provide an equivalent for "at many times and in many ways" because there is none: for when God revealed Himself through His Son, it took place all at one time and through one means.

The rest of the prologue consists of a series of four relative clauses modifying the "Son." These clauses further explain how God's message in Jesus goes beyond the previous revelation.

The first and fourth clauses speak of Jesus as Heir: Jesus inherited everything, and is as superior to the angels as is the name that He inherited. Maybe someone can enlighten me, but I have not read anywhere in Scripture that an angel inherited anything. Putting the first and fourth relative clauses together then, Jesus is as much superior to an angel as everything is to nothing. He is infinitely superior. The Jews in the first century believed that God used angels as intermediaries when He gave the Law to Moses. (See Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:2) Since Jesus is God and superior to angels, his message must also be superior to theirs. The most important messenger implies the most important message.

The remaining relative clauses relate to the person and work of Jesus. They show Him as a representative of God to humanity and of humanity to God, a theme to which I will return (e.g., 3:1). Jesus is clearly divine because He is involved in creating (1:2) and sustaining (1:3) the world. These are things that only God does. Furthermore, He is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature" (1:3). The terms "radiance" and "exact representation" have specific connotations. We see the stars through the radiance of their visible light. Stamped upon each coin is the exact shape of the die which made it. Likewise, Jesus has displayed both the glory and the nature of God on earth so that we can know Him (cf. John 1:18). He has shown us what it is that makes God, Himself. In terms of representing man to God, the prologue also portrays Jesus as "making purification for sins," i.e., serving as a priest, a theme the author covers extensively later in the book.

To summarize, the prologue of Hebrews asserts both the continuity between the stages of God's revelation and the superiority of the revelation in Jesus. After God spoke, He spoke again in Jesus. This latter message completed a revelation begun long ago and fully revealed who God is. At the heart of who God is, is His desire to have a relationship with us. This motivated Jesus to offer Himself so that we could have an opportunity to be right with God.

God has spoken. Are we listening by "hold[ing] fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end" (3:14)?

“Be Faithful Unto Death and I Will Give You the Crown of Life”

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Paul Birston

Revelation 2:8–11, Part 1 Introduction to Smyrna the “Crown City”

The journey from Ephesus, the destination of Jesus’ first Revelation letter, to Smyrna is about 55km (33 miles) as the crow flies north and slightly west through fertile valleys and over green hills. Over the last rise we would see a panorama of the famous city of Smyrna, “first in Asia in beauty and size.”



Agora at Smyrna

Smyrna has an excellent harbour at the east end of a 64 km (40 mile) long gulf from the deep blue Aegean Sea to the west. Merchants, longshoremen and slaves load ships with goods from the far east via the international trade route which enters Smyrna through the Hermus Valley from the east via Philadelphia, Sardis and Laodicea. Smyrna’s name may be from the ancient Greek name for myrrh, a major export of this prosperous city.

Smyrna is surrounded by large rolling hills. Some are quite prominent. Mount Pagos to the southeast overlooks the large Smyrna agora. On and around the Mount Pagos acropolis (literally “top of the city”) are many prominent public buildings: its citadel, temples, porticoes and a 20,000 seat theatre just slightly smaller than the 25,000 seat theatre in Ephesus. Mount Pagos looks like a crown on the head of the city. Smyrna has a reputation as “the crown city.”

Appolonius of Tyana in Anatolian Cappadocia, a contemporary of the beloved Apostle John, wrote of Smyrna, “For though your city is the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, and makes the sea its own, and holds the fountains of the Zephyrus (god of the west wind), yet it is a greater charm to wear a crown of men than a crown of porticoes, for buildings are seen only in their own place, but men are seen everywhere, and make their city as vast as the range of countries which they visit.”

Aelius Aristides of Smyrna later spoke of his city as having the “crown of life” referring to the dominant hilltop acropolis of Mount Pagos metaphorically seen as the crown of a statue whose feet were at the seashore.

As we move into the city we walk along its wide streets laid out in a grid pattern. We come to Smyrna’s most famous street, the “Street of Gold,” which connects the temple of Zeus, the father of the Olympian gods and goddesses, to the temple of Cybele, the Anatolian Phrygian primal mother of the gods and mediator between the living and the dead.

There is also a temple to Dionysus, or Bacchus, as the Romans call him, the god of wine, fertility, religious ecstasy, festivity and theatre. We learn the Smyrneans are fond of worshipping Dionysus. Each spring there is a religious celebration of the renewal of life at which the priests of Dionysus wear crowns and reenact a mock death, burial and resurrection.



There is a temple to Roma, the female deity who personified the city of Rome and symbolized the ideal woman. Smyrna became a loyal ally of Rome in 195 BC. Its citizens built this temple for the worship of the Roma cult, the first of its kind in this region which reflects Smyrna’s loyalty to Rome.



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The famous first century BC Roman statesman, orator and skeptic philosopher, Cicero, who served for a time as proconsul of Cilicia, the home province of the Apostle Paul, called Smyrna “one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies.”

We see further evidence of Smyrna’s loyalty to Rome as we learn that in the year of our Lord 26, the Roman senate chose Smyrna over Ephesus and Pergamum as site for this new temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius. This reminds us of the Sabastoi temple back in Ephesus built to honour the Flavian emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. Domitian had his father Vespasian and brother Titus worshiped as gods and delighted himself in being called “Lord” and “Our Master and our God.” Sadly, the Roman province of Asia

has been a leader in emperor worship for a long time.

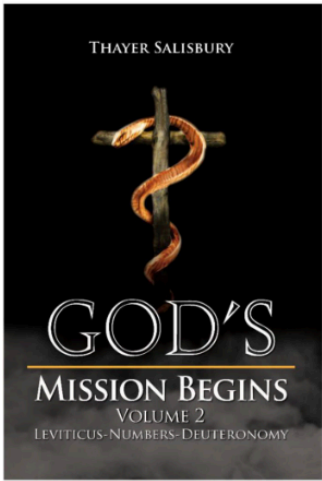
Smyrna is an ancient city. People have lived here since ca. 3000 BC. It was first dominated by Aeolians, one of four ancient Greek tribes. Later it flourished under the Ionians in about the 7th century BC. The Lydians destroyed Smyrna in the 6th century BC reducing it to minor village status for about 300 years. Glorious ancient Smyrna was essentially dead.

Locals think it was Alexander the Great who had a dream in which he conceived a scheme to revive the city in the 330's. Finally Smyrna was rebuilt by Lysimachus, one of the *diadochi*, a word meaning successors, the rival generals, families and friends of Alexander who fought for control over his empire after his death. Some see this rebirth of Smyrna as the resurrection of "the crown city," "the crown of life."

Smyrna also has a Jewish population of those dispersed around the Mediterranean basin following the deportation and exile to Babylon and the terrible wars in Israel as Alexander's empire gradually unraveled and the Romans took over. We know the hostility Paul experienced from the unreceptive Jews he encountered throughout the provinces around Anatolia (Asia Minor today).

We see why Smyrna is such a tough place for our first-century brothers and sisters in Christ to be faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus. All around them are material symbols of devotion to Rome, emperor worship, the allure of their pagan gods, the debauchery of Dionysus and the spring death and resurrection rituals of "the crown city."

We know Jesus is there among His people in Smyrna. Jesus knows all about Smyrna and what is going on. He knows about its reputation as the "crown city," its rebirth after Alexander, its devotion to Rome and the opposition those assembled in Him receive.



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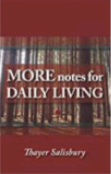

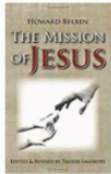
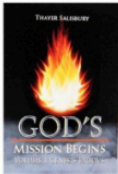
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We see why so many of the things Jesus has John write to our brothers and sisters in Smyrna make so much sense to them and are so encouraging. His words counter their culture and triumph over it. Their faithfulness in difficult circumstances has a great reward. The crown Jesus gives us infinitely superior, life forever.

Jesus' letter to Smyrna is the shortest of His seven, and like Philadelphia, they receive no convicting rebuke from Him.

Jesus' Letter to His Assembly in Smyrna in Revelation 2:8–11

“And to the angel of the assembly in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: ⁹ ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. ‘He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’”

Jesus is **“The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life”** (2:8). He reminds His people of what He has revealed earlier in His apocalyptic prophetic letter in chapter 1 verses 17 and 18 when our fellow partaker in suffering John first saw his glorious vision of Jesus, **“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I became dead (was dead), and behold, I am*living (alive) forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’”**

A recruitment poster for Meaford Church of Christ. On the left is a stylized illustration of a white lighthouse with a red cross on top, set against a black background with red wavy lines at the base. To the right of the lighthouse, the text reads: "We are seaching for a minister to fill the leadership role of the preacher, teacher, and pastoral care for our congregation." Below this, the church's name "Meaford Church of Christ" is written in a large, stylized font, with "Meaford" in a cursive script and "Church of Christ" in a bold, blocky font. At the bottom right, contact information is provided: "Please Respond To: Meaford Church of Christ, Minister Selection Committee, 113 Nelson Street West, Meaford, On N4L 1G3 Email: meafordcofc@gmail.com".

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Jesus speaks in emphatic terms reminiscent of His Father, our great “I AM.” Through His servant John He speaks in clear contrasts: first and last, death and life, light and darkness, love and hate.

He is the first, the *protos*, the primary, the prominence, the first in importance in time and eternity. He is the last, the *eschatos*, the ultimate, the final, God’s Alpha and Omega, A to Z all inclusive eternal living Word.

Jesus, not Caesar, is the eternal Lord of the universe, the first and last, ever present through the rise and fall of all kingdoms and empires, past, present and future. He is always out front ahead of His people, then now and forever.

He became dead, past tense. He has come to life in a glorious eternal resurrection body. He is the good message, the good news, the gospel Paul taught us: **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve”** (1 Corinthians 15:3–5).

Jesus was out front of the Smyrneans in suffering, death and resurrection. If they were to die for Him He would be with them, raise them up as the One with authority over life and death, and give them the crown of life.

To be continued...

Waterloo, Ontario

Salvation Through Liberation?

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Kevin Cleary

Part 1

The Jews in the first century were under the authority of Rome. They longed for the day that they would be freed from their oppression by the coming Messiah. So strong was their focus on physical deliverance that they rejected God's deliverance. Even Jesus' closest followers struggled to understand his mission (Mrk 8:31-32; 9:30). In our time, several social and historical factors have left people seeking deliverance and feeling little hope. For some, especially youth, the woke movement offers a promise of freedom from oppression. We can admit that oppression is real, and that people face various obstacles in the world. As Christians who oppose oppression should we join the woke movement does it offer a viable solution? Should the Church get woke or has the mundane tricked people into adopting a cure which is worse than the disease? Worse yet, have Christians, like God's people of the past, confused their mission and similarly missed the call of God?

What is Woke?

Throughout history various thinkers have understood that something is wrong with the world and like our example above, longed for something better. One of those thinkers was Karl Marx. Marx applied the Hegelian dialectic to economics and envisioned a synthesis which would offer economic freedom to the oppressed (proletariat) from their capitalist overlords (bourgeois). Marx's economic theory has held great appeal for many despite its catastrophic consequences within cruel regimes around the world.

Not long after Marx, certain academics, especially those of the Frankfurt school and then the institution for social research at Columbia university, applied Marx's economic divisions to sociology. They agreed with Marx about the oppressor-oppressed power dynamic,



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but deemed it to be a cultural division rather than an economic one. Thus, liberation could be achieved not by the economic implementation of communism or socialism but by sweeping cultural change.

It was not the capitalists oppressing the workers, (although that was still true) rather, it was Western culture also known as white Christian culture oppressing subordinate cultures. In order to change culture, it was necessary to help people see this oppression and being aware of it, respond accordingly. Those who engage in the effort to identify oppression / oppressive ideas, make people aware of it, and cause them to respond to it, are called Critical Theorists. This is the academic term, while the layman's term for those who believe Critical Theory is "woke." These academics have been doing their work for some time in the sociology departments of universities. As their field has expanded and developed, it has broken down into various sub-disciplines. These disciplines are now specific areas of study in which a person may pursue a degree.

Two lists become important at this point in our discussion. One is a list of ideas or cultural norms deemed to be oppressive, while the second is a list of academic studies that fall under the broader heading of Critical Studies (sometimes called applied studies, grievance studies, or by opponents cultural Marxism).

The first list can be somewhat difficult to delineate as those who believe in it consider all of culture to be the problem and making oppression, systematic. That said, certain key "oppressive" cultural values have been identified, such as; history, religion, justice, hard work, self-reliance, respect of authority, the nuclear family, win at all costs, woman's beauty based on blonde, thin — 'Barbie', heavy value on ownership of goods, space and property, individualism, objectivity, progress and delayed gratification. It is worth bearing in mind that; reason, mathematics and linear thinking have also been associated with oppression. Christianity is not often listed however, it is well documented from the time of Marx on, that Christian faith is viewed as one of the most oppressive influences that must be removed.

The second list is useful in two ways. First it reveals how pervasive Critical Theory and related studies have become. It is also helpful in identifying those who are true believers in this theory. The fields of: Critical Race Theory, Gender Studies, Queer Theory, Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism, Critical Pedagogy, and Feminism are all critical studies. I will not define all of these but will leave the reader to their own research. One term here does explain a great deal of the turmoil we have witnessed in schools. Critical Pedagogy describes training children to adopt a critical (Marxist) mindset.

Having established some central concepts, we can go one step further to the work of Neil Shenvi. Neil has done extensive research and spoken on Critical Theory and its influence in several venues. He identifies four key tenets of Critical Theory which he calls Contemporary Critical Theory. Each is believed to be true and together they serve as a starting point from which to proceed.

The four tenets are:

- **The Social Binary** – Society is viewed as a fight for power between a dominant cultural group and a subordinate one. For example, white, Christian males are one such dominant cultural group. Subordinate groups such as women, 'people of colour', and various sexual identities are all among the oppressed of the world. *Intersectionality* is the discipline which seeks to explain how these groups relate to one another.

- **Oppressive Hegemony** – A set of cultural values or norms which the dominant culture uses to keep subordinate cultures in line. (We listed some of these ideas or norms above)
- **Standpoint Theory** – Only those who are oppressed have access to truth. This is why we are told that only women can have an opinion on abortion, or only racialized people can speak about racism.
- **Social Justice** – Liberation through opposition to and a removal of the oppressive cultural group and or it's ideas. "Down with the patriarchy", is one expression of social justice. As would be, "down with heteronormativity".

The process by which a person comes to believe in the tenets of Critical Theory is in popular jargon called "getting woke." Critical theory is the primary approach taken by the political left, as well as most in the entertainment industry, human resource departments, and educational institutions.

This article (part one of this series) is intended as a high level introduction to the academic theory known as Critical Theory or Critical Studies. In part 2 we will consider the impact that Critical Theory is having on society and how Christians might effectively respond.

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Stewardship of Nature

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

First, a warning. This article is not my usual kind of writing. Nor is it the kind of thing that is normally seen in the Gospel Herald. Stick with it. You will find it biblical and practical in the end.

.....

My parents were both born at the beginning of the Great Depression. They grew up during that depression and the war that followed. For them, gardening was a necessity of life. They learned to grow vegetables, slaughter animals, and preserve food. They learned to repair the old because they did not have money to buy new.

I was born at a time when the economy of North America was prospering as never before (or since). We had no competitors. The cities of Europe and Japan had been bombed to rubble between 1940 and 1945. Their factories were still being rebuilt. Technologically speaking, China was barely past the Middle Ages. American and Canadian companies competed mostly with themselves. If one lost his job, he could always get another one. There was inflation but pay was generally rising faster than the prices.

My parents tried to teach me to garden and to repair things that were broken. I took some interest in building and repairing, but I hated the gardening. "What is the point?" I would ask. "We can buy corn and beans at the store."

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By the time I left home, my parents had capitulated, not so much to me but to the general trend of society. They were no longer growing a garden.

A few years into our marriage, my wife asked if I would help her plant some flowers along the south side of the house. I agreed, but I set one condition. I wanted it understood that once I had prepared the flower bed, my involvement in the project would end. I warned that the first time I was asked to pull weeds, or do anything else in that flower bed, I would mow off the flowers and go back to having a plain yard – all grass, nothing else, and therefore easier to mow.

We had four sons. By the time the oldest was ten, he could handle the mowing. By the time the youngest went away to college, I had not mowed the lawn in thirty years. It was not that I was lazy (I hope). I felt that my time was better spent elsewhere. But my thinking about this work had been undergoing a transition.

Quite a few years later, we moved to work with a church that owned a parsonage next door to the church building. Before moving, I asked if I should bring a lawn mower with

me. I was told, “No, we think your time is better spent on other things. The people who care for the church yard will also mow the parsonage lawn.”

It was obvious that the house and the church were somehow connected. So, the condition of the house was a reflection on the church. When we moved, I observed that the shrubs had been neglected and that the siding and shutters on the house were in poor condition. I also overheard a brother in the church comment regarding my predecessor, “That man was so lazy that he would not even mow his own lawn.”

So, I decided that my son would mow the lawn, and that I would lend a hand trimming the shrubs and making the place look



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more presentable. I even helped my wife plant flowers and raise vegetables (one year she canned 130 pints of green beans).

The church was paying big money to have a lawn service spray the grass with chemicals each month. We put a stop to that. The cost was a burden to the church and the chemicals were a problem as well. The city folks always blame the dangerous algae bloom in Lake Erie on the farmers, but fertilizing lawns every month makes less sense than fertilizing fields that produce food. Square meter by square meter, it also creates more fertilizer runoff.

A side effect of stopping the spraying was that we started finding little trees popping up in various places around the yard. These were native trees (maples, walnuts, and oaks) not exotic varieties imported from elsewhere. When we would find a nice seedling, we would transplant it to a good location where it might thrive. After some years, the previously treeless yard had a maple, an oak, and four walnut trees.

People noticed. We began to get comments from neighbours and church members about our diligence in gardening and trying to improve the yard.

Regrets, I've had a few

Looking back, I wish that I had taken an interest in these things sooner. One person cannot change the whole world. One person cannot have a major effect on the environment. But we can, and should, care for the little piece of nature that God has placed in our hands. Even if all I have under my care is a small plot in the city, it is still part of God's creation. It is still to be used to his glory. God commanded Adam to care for the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Each believer should feel a responsibility for any portion of this earth committed to his care. For too long, I neglected that.

Often, canned food from the store costs no more than what we manage to grow. But is cost the only consideration? Taste might be a factor as well. What about the environmental impact of the way commercial crops are raised and distributed?

Nurturing a few trees that pop up in the lawn, allowing them to grow to maturity, is not making a huge environmental difference. But it is making a difference.

Adorn the gospel

I am not changing the subject, although it may seem so for a moment.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan appointed James Watt Secretary of the Interior. The main task of Secretary of the Interior is to care for the land owned by the federal government. James Watt was known to be a believer, and if there is one thing the news media hates, it is anyone who shows signs of being an active Christian while having a role in government. It was arranged that a hearing would be held in congress and that James Watt would be asked how his faith in the final coming of Christ would affect the policies he made regarding the use of federal land.

Bill Moyers, among many others, went ahead to report what they expected Watt to say, even though Watt's answer was almost the opposite of what they had expected. According to Moyers, James Watt told Congress that protecting natural resources was

unimportant because of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Moyers quoted Watt as having said, “after the last tree is felled, Christ will come back.”

In fact, Watt’s reply had indicated that we have no way of controlling when Christ will come again, and no way of predicting it. According to those who were at the hearing, his reply was, “I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns. Whatever it is, we have to manage with skill to leave the resources needed for future generations.”

The false narrative was repeated by many. Moyers eventually apologized to Watt for misquoting him. Yet he also defended himself by claiming that the same misquote had been printed by both the Washington Post and Time magazine. The false narrative (fake news) has lingered in many minds. Why? A false narrative like that survives because that is how unbelievers have been taught to think about Christians. They assume that we believe in wasting resources. They have been taught to think that Christians are anti-science and willingly wasteful. Unfortunately, that may be true of a few unfaithful Christians. But, overall, this narrative is not factual. It is, however, stubbornly maintained.

Because of the Christian’s belief that “The earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1), faithful Christians are the most careful people in the world with natural resources. Since nothing in the earth belongs to us, because we hold it in trust for our heavenly Father, we are taught to be more careful with the earth than anyone.

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Ontario) -Full time Evangelist.

Our congregation of approximately 40, is looking for an Evangelistic Minister to assist an aging membership on our journey through this world. We are seeking a person who has a demonstrated commitment to the beliefs and practices of the mainstream churches of Christ. The evangelist will work with us to not only meet the needs of the congregation today but aid us in establishing a congregation for tomorrow by actively promoting His word. As the world changes around us, we are looking for a person who can preach the word of God to show us that regardless of the changes, God’s word is steadfast and with us always. We prefer a married person who has graduated from a noted Christian College but will consider someone with demonstrated experience. Demonstrated ability to relate to recent immigrants would be an asset since Sault Ste. Marie is a partner in Canada’s Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP). See <https://www.facebook.com/pinehillcoc/> for more information about Pinehill. Send resumes to secretary.pinehillcochrist@gmail.com. “Salary and compensation package can be discussed with qualified applicants” (Note this is a continuation of search started in 2020)



But it is hard to convince those who have believed the lie. They hear the lie so often. The only way to convince them of the truth is to constantly demonstrate it in our lives – even in the smallest things. What are some of the little things that we could do?

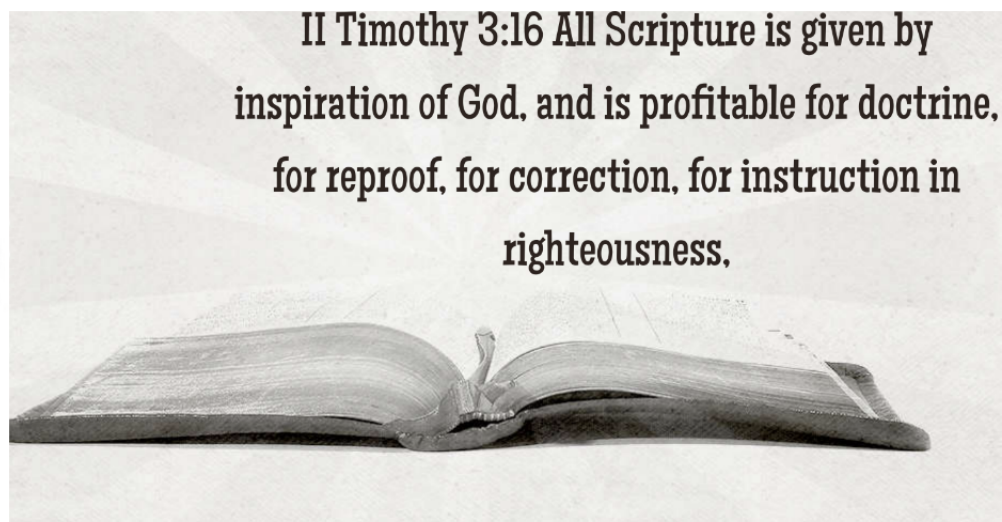
- We should be raising food locally instead of having it shipped around the world.
- We should not overuse herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers.
- We should be planting trees, ideally local trees that we might find springing up in our yards.
- We should use the old for as long as practical. Changing the carpet, or the cabinets, or getting a new car, just because we want to change, is not faithful to the Lord. It is bad stewardship of the money he has given us, as well as of natural resources.

Our parents may have had to make do with the old. Economic necessity may have forced them to raise their own food. If we do it not of necessity, but out of a desire to make the best use of what God has given us, we might eventually make a dent in this false narrative about Christian attitudes toward the environment.

Of course, example alone is unlikely to communicate. Jesus did not just come to earth and set a good example. He taught with words, so that people would understand what his actions were saying. But words, if there are not actions to back them, will not help. If we are as wasteful as our neighbours, they will not take kindly to our words about the earth belonging to God. We ought to be good stewards of the resources God has placed at our disposal; and we ought to tell people that we care for the earth because it is God's creation.

See also: Titus 2:9-10; Dt 10:14; Psalm 50:12; 89:11; Luke 16:10; 1 Cor 10:23-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11]

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Yes and No

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

In order to be like our heavenly Father, Jesus teaches us to tell the truth and to keep our promises (Mt. 5:37). The words *yes* and *no* are perfectly able to convey meaning, provided that we mean what we say. This is so both for us and for God.

Now it is rare for us to question the will of God when He says ‘yes’. This is especially true when God grants something that we want or commands something with which we agree. We only feel the need to ‘interpret’ a yes, when we prefer a no.

In the first century, Jewish Christians understood that God had said yes to the Gentiles, including them in his offer of salvation in Christ. Some Jewish members of the church wanted to add conditions to God’s salvation. They taught that Gentiles must also be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). Others even refused to eat with their Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:11-14). The New Testament condemns those who add conditions to God’s unequivocal yes, and so must we.

The apostle Paul tells us that all of the promises of God find their ‘yes’ (or fulfillment) in Christ (II Cor 1:20). In eternity, God decided to send his Son to earth, to save the world from sin (Eph 1). He even took an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, he might secure the certainty of this decision (Heb 6:17-18). There were no conditions under which God would fail to do what he had decided. God’s yes was unequivocally yes.

When Jesus accomplished all that God had sent him to do, God was empowered to offer salvation from sin. God said ‘yes’ to our need for forgiveness and yes to his own promise to make it available. Yet it turns out, that God’s offer of salvation may only be accepted by complying with the conditions that He has set. Those who reject any of God’s conditions for salvation, are able to turn God’s yes into a no (Acts 13:34).

Naaman was a man to whom God said yes (2nd Kings 5:10). God said yes, but Naaman heard no. God said yes, with conditions attached. Naaman could be healed by doing two things; by going to the Jordan river and dipping seven times in its waters. At first, Naaman refused. As long as he rejected God’s conditions, God’s yes remained a ‘no’. Naaman chose to be offended rather than obedient, and for a time, chose to remain a leper.

When God adds conditions to a ‘yes’, he is not pretending to say yes while intending to say no. God is not the one being *weighed in the balances* as we make our choice. Divine conditions remind us that God is God and that we are not. Human submission and obedience to the will of God is both reasonable and right. God wishes to bless, but does not force himself upon us. Therefore, even when God says yes to something that we desperately need, he allows us to refuse.

Sometimes God says no, just when we wish that he had said yes. When God forbids without adding conditions, it is hard to be still and *know* that He is God.

Balaam was a man who refused to take no for an answer. As a prophet of God, he had a reputation for success. His prophecies had all come true, leading to the belief among some that it was Balaam who had it so.

When Israel was encamped in Moabite territory, Balak, the king of the Moabites asked Balaam to come and to curse the Israelites (Numbers 22). When he responded, Balaam said all of the right things, but did not want to do what he said. He claimed, that he would only be able to say, whatever God allowed him to say. Balak replied 'name your price'. As the price increased, Balaam's tried harder to 'seal the deal'.

But God said 'no'. Do not go for the purpose of cursing Israel. This was an unconditional no.

Balaam wanted the money, and kept on asking. What he was after was a qualified no, or a partial yes. A yes to one thing that might lead to another yes..as in 'yes you can go, and at least for now, you cannot curse'.

What Balaam was not ready for was for God to say, yes you *must* go and yes you *will* bless. Since you insist, I will put you where you do not want to be and make you say what you do not want to say. God was so angry with Balaam that He almost killed him on the way to Moab. God turned Balaam's greed against him.

Once in Moab, Balaam tried three times to curse Israel, but he blessed them instead. In Deuteronomy 23:5, Moses explained to Israel that "...God was unwilling to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God *turned the curse into a blessing for you* because the Lord your God loves you".



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Balaam was a wicked prophet who spoke the truth but did not mean it. He said one thing, but did the opposite. We find out in Revelation 2:14 that while Balaam could not curse Israel, he understood that God had already placed Israel under a curse should they become unfaithful. Thus he advised Balak to send young women into the Israelite camp, seducing the men to worship Baal and to engage in sexual immorality. 24,000 Israelites died at Peor because of Balaam. Balaam said yes, when God had said no. He thought that he had outwitted God. When Joshua invaded Canaan, Balaam was killed in the fighting (Josh 13:22). Balaam engaged in a form of madness (2nd Peter 2:16) that tempts us all and which we must resist.

When God says no, it is not time to get inventive. It is not time to reinterpret or second guess. It is not time to add conditions, twisting God's no into a yes. We cannot bind what God has not bound, or loose, what He has not loosed.

May we resolve, that when God speaks, we will submit, accept and obey.

seek. serve. become.



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Our One Blossom Rose Bush

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

We have a rose bush beside the driveway. I am not expert on roses; but it seems to be different from other rosebushes I have seen in the past. As I recall, most rosebushes produce flowers repeatedly during the warm weather. They also produce several flowers at once.

Since we now live in an area that rarely has frost, one might have expected this plant to produce many flowers. But it does not. This bush produces one bloom at a time. And it takes its time about it too. It seems to me that we only get three or four flowers per year from this rosebush. They always come one at a time. They develop slowly.

When the bud is full and about to blossom, my wife cuts the stem and takes it into the house. The one pictured here had been in the house several days. I should have taken the photo sooner, when it was at its best. But even a couple of days past its prime, it still looks nice.

Somehow, I think that there should be a lesson here.

Three writers, Luke, Paul, and John wrote slightly more than 70% of the New Testament. Each of them accounted for at least 20% of the total number of words.

Other writers wrote less. Some wrote much less. James, for example, wrote less than 1.5%. Jude's percentage would be even lower. But still, their work was important and enduring. Quantity-wise, the Lord did not use them for nearly as much writing as was done by Luke, Paul, or John. But their writing was important. Their short writings have been used by God to accomplish great things. And there was more to their work than writing. God used them in other ways as well.

The same is true for us. We do not all have the same role. We do not all produce the same quantity of work. But whatever it is God has given us to do, let us do it with joy, determination, and commitment (see Eccl 9:10; 1 Cor 12:12ff).

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